

## Afghan Support Center

# TUCSON HIGHLIGHTS

June 1 – 3, 2023

The Tucson Afghan Support Center was a huge success, and we are excited to share a collection of inspirational stories from the three-day event. Between June 1 and 3, our providers assisted 258 Afghans – 43% of the local population. Guests reported their experiences were very favorable, with 89% saying they were very or extremely satisfied. It was incredibly powerful to see local nonprofits, businesses and organizations involved in the effort dedicated to the mission of serving immigrants on their American journey. We look forward to continuing the great momentum from our first two events while at the SAFE Credit Union Convention Center in Sacramento from June 21 to 24. For more information, please visit [centersforafghansupport.org](https://centersforafghansupport.org).



**Pima Community College** works with more than 600 adult Afghans who want to start or continue their education. The school provides virtual and in-person ESL classes four days a week. Most Afghans enrolled in the program have been in the country for less than a year and are designated as emergent readers. After achieving basic English skills, counselors work closely with students to educate them on additional pathways. Possible next steps include preparing for a High School Equivalency diploma, transitioning to a college curriculum and eventually preparing for citizenship interviews. **Sara Haghighi** shared a story about a recent student who was a photographer working alongside the Associated Press while in Afghanistan. After numerous threats to his life, he sought safety in the U.S. He enrolled in ESL classes and volunteered to photograph events at the college. He later shared his story with Arizona legislators, talking about the importance of education for newly arrived Afghans. Soon after, the Arizona Daily Star hired him as a staff photographer. Sara stressed that the college offers more than education. The Pima Community College team creates opportunities to build communities, establish permanence and create new lives.



When Afghans began arriving in 2021, **ICNA Relief** mobilized to support their immediate needs by providing housing, furniture, clothing and transportation. In Tucson, **Salim Imam** and **Ahmed Seyam Beyroz** continued helping Afghans on their path toward self-sufficiency. The duo connected job seekers with staffing agencies, as many are looking for highly skilled engineers and electricians. They helped enroll guests at Grand Canyon University, where within one semester, a student can complete a pre-apprenticeship for electricians and begin working. They also highlighted the availability of their math tutoring program held every Wednesday and Saturday for younger learners, ages 5 to 22. Housing and food costs remain high, so one income for families often isn't enough. Salim encouraged women to sign up for English classes, apply for a driver's license and look for part-time employment opportunities. ICNA Relief also invited Afghans to attend their back-to-school event in August, where families will be given backpacks, school supplies, food and personal hygiene items.



For more than 20 years, **The Welcome to America Project** has helped immigrants feel welcomed and connected, as well as find opportunities in their new communities. **Kevin Groman** and **Ashley Lucie** distributed hundreds of Chromebooks to Afghans in both Tucson and Phoenix. These devices serve a critical role in job searches, helping families learn English and accessing benefits. With the power of video chats, Chromebooks help many immigrants see their children, parents and other relatives back home for the first time in months. WTAP also offered career bridging counseling by asking clients about their former jobs and aspirations for work in the United States. Kevin shared a story of a man who had previously worked in agriculture and was quickly connected to a farm tech business in the area with immediate openings. The team inspired everyone at the event to continue their path to self-sufficiency.

The **USCRI Behavioral Health** team of **Rebecca Onagoruwa** and **Sher Ahmad** was on hand to raise awareness of their trauma-informed, culturally appropriate care program. Afghans have endured stressful conditions, face challenges integrating into American culture, and remain rightfully concerned about friends or family back in Afghanistan, where economic and societal conditions continue to deteriorate. In response, USCRI has created services in four areas: a multilingual 24-hour helpline, telehealth services, community behavioral health teams and critical response teams.